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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 7 October 2008, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Majoor (Netherlands)
later: Mr. Peralta (Vice-Chairman) (Paraguay)
later: Mr. Majoor (Chairman) (Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m.

Agenda item 55: Social development (continued)

- (a) **Implementation of the World Summit for Social Development and of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly (continued)** (A/63/133)
- (b) **Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (continued)** (A/63/183 and A/63/184)
- (c) **Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing (continued)** (A/63/95)
- (d) **United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all (continued)** (A/63/172)
- (e) **Review and appraisal of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (continued)** (A/63/183)

1. **Mr. Zelenev** (Division for Social Policy and Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)), in response to a question from the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic the previous day regarding the activities of the Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development relating to war and conflict situations and persons with disabilities, said that the Special Rapporteur had an independent office situated in Doha, Qatar, which published material relating to his work. Those documents, including those dealing with war and conflict situations and persons with disabilities, could be obtained directly from that office. Contact details for the office were available from the Secretariat.

2. **Mr. Chabar** (Morocco) said that there could be no excuse for failing to promote full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, productive and decent work for all and poverty eradication, yet 60 years after the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights financial turmoil, high unemployment, the informal economy and the lack of social protection had increased uncertainty in labour markets. It was therefore all the more urgent to make job creation and stability a priority. He expressed concern, however, at the effect of increasingly unpredictable consequences of globalization on the developing countries and the goal of full employment

and wondered whether full employment meant one thing in the developed countries and another in the developing countries.

3. He welcomed the adoption by the International Labour Conference at its 97th session of a Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization with a view to promoting fair globalization through decent work. That principle would guide his Government in its firm commitment to the realization of the Copenhagen commitments and the Millennium Development Goals. Sharing of experience and strengthened international cooperation, in particular with regard to debt relief and official development assistance (ODA), would accelerate the achievement of those goals. The international community must show the political will to develop an aggressive and innovative strategy to promote full productive employment and social cohesion and mitigate the effects of the international economic system on employment.

4. He welcomed the prominence given in the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/133) to the need to invest in agriculture and enterprise development, in particular farms and rural enterprises. His Government, through the Green Morocco Plan, was promoting rural and agricultural development and increased productivity. An agricultural development agency would be established to implement the Plan, which would create tens of thousands of jobs and make agriculture the driving force of the national economy.

5. His Government had incorporated international human rights standards into a social development strategy that made the individual the cornerstone of public development policy. It had launched a National Human Development Initiative in 2005 aimed at promoting human dignity by reducing poverty and unemployment, promoting the rights of women and children, increasing the access of the disadvantaged to basic services and strengthening social protection mechanisms, in particular by reducing exclusion, increasing education rates and reforming the social system in both rural and urban areas.

6. The Initiative was aimed at helping individuals acquire the skills to enter local labour markets and manage small and medium enterprises. Numerous measures had been adopted in the areas of training and education to help the unemployed, including persons with disabilities, obtain employment. Vocational training centres and social resource offices had been

established throughout the country to provide training to disadvantaged girls, lower girls' school dropout rates, meet the educational needs of poor rural girls.

7. Furthermore, tens of thousands of micro-credit schemes had facilitated the creation of revenue-generating activities, providing decent working conditions to many citizens and their families. Counselling services were available to assist the young and disadvantaged and promote local-level projects for unskilled workers. Such efforts were in keeping with his Government's commitment to building a modern society based on a human rights-based development policy and to cooperating with international partners to ensure sustainable economic development and full and productive employment for all.

8. **Mr. Thiebou** (Netherlands) recalled that Eleanor Roosevelt had highlighted the need to give more attention to the problems of youth but 70 years later, and 60 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, despite progress made, many challenges remained. For example, he expressed disappointment that, although half of the world's population was under 25 and in spite of the reaffirmation by the General Assembly in its resolution 62/126 of the importance of youth participation in decision-making, less than 10 per cent of Member States had been able to send a youth delegate to the current session of the General Assembly.

9. It was urgent to allow youth to give a voice to their generation and influence public policy to help those in need. Investing in and focusing on young people and enlisting their help was perhaps the most effective way of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) because young people best understood their own problems and would have to deal with the consequences of current decisions and find solutions in the future for a better world. Wherever and whenever decisions were taken that affected youth they must be involved.

10. Good health was a prerequisite for young people's participation, yet nearly a billion people had no access to drinking water, and two and a half billion people had no access to proper sanitary facilities. That was a human tragedy for children and young people, more of whom died from the effects of contaminated water than from AIDS or armed conflict. In developing countries, 80 per cent of diseases that affected young people were water-related. Many of them, in particular

girls, did not attend school or dropped out because of poor sanitary facilities.

11. Although the technical and financial means to end the water and sanitation crisis existed, many parts of the world still lacked action plans to promote access to water and sanitation. Young people should be involved in designing water and sanitation schemes, for example for schools, and should be encouraged to act as peer educators to teach the importance of hygiene. All young people had the right to good health and human dignity, which implied access to clean water and sanitation. In that context, he welcomed the recognition by the Netherlands of the right to water and sanitation as a human right. Lastly, he stressed that young people did not want promises, good intentions and resolutions; they wanted real solutions and actions. Their thirst for participation could only be quenched by concrete measures aimed at involving them in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and implementing General Assembly resolution 62/126 and by including them in delegations and decision-making at all levels.

12. **Mr. Rakovsky** (Russian Federation) said that the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the twenty-fourth session of the General Assembly, the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, and also the goals formulated as a result of the Millennium Declaration, remained important guidelines for States in their social policies.

13. A constructive dialogue in the Commission for Social Development would surely be of interest for all groups of States and offered the best opportunity for working out an effective policy on key social development issues. The Commission continued to play an important role as the main coordinator of international cooperation on issues of ageing, youth, equal opportunities for the disabled and strengthening the role of the family. He welcomed the Human Rights Council's adoption of the draft optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Unfortunately, the text remained contradictory in parts, as it took into account the opinions of as many States parties as possible.

14. His Government was implementing large-scale projects to improve the demographic situation and solve social problems as part of its long-term social

and economic development plan for the period up to 2020. The national economy could be made more effective, sustainable and innovative only by developing the human factor through large-scale investment in health and education, and by ensuring safe and decent living conditions. Within 10 or 15 years, the Russian Federation expected to join the leading countries on key social indicators such as income, social protection, education, health, life expectancy, environmental health and housing.

15. The social and moral health of society had an impact on children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities and the family. Government youth policy was based on the priorities of a global programme of action. The federal agency for youth issues had the task of creating employment opportunities and healthy living conditions for young people and encouraging them to share the ideals of peace and mutual understanding. Ageing was a demographic reality in the Russian Federation: older persons accounted for 20 per cent of the country's citizens, and would account for 25 per cent by 2016. They were provided with assistance on the basis of strategies elaborated at the Second World Assembly on Ageing and the provisions of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The mechanism for increasing pensions and a programme to provide social protection and access to health for older persons were intended to ensure a dignified old age.

16. In the context of the treaty event held in New York in conjunction with the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Russian Federation had recently signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. His country paid close attention to improving the living conditions of persons with disabilities and to their rehabilitation and integration into society. There were 12 million persons with disabilities in the Russian Federation. Under a federal social assistance programme for persons with disabilities for 2006-2010, modern technology was being installed in health institutions to ensure their access to housing, social protection and transport, education and employment.

17. In the Russian Federation, 2008 had been declared the Year of the Family on the initiative of the President. State structures, political and social institutions, and businesses, religious organizations and the mass media were all taking part to support the family as the main embodiment of social and moral

values. Sustainable development was a global task that required pooled efforts and capacities both within States and in the context of the entire international community if they were to make genuine progress in overcoming the obstacles on the path to social progress.

18. **Mr. Al-Shami** (Yemen) said that employment and decent work were a priority for his country. The third Five-Year Social and Economic Development Plan, covering the period 2006-2010, focused on encouraging economic growth and investment on the one hand, and developing a comprehensive approach to tackle unemployment and poverty on the other hand. Legislation had been passed to remedy gaps in the labour regime and improve wages. A national strategy was creating work in small and medium enterprises.

19. Yemen had taken part in the consultations that led to the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and had been among the first States to sign it together with the Optional Protocol. The Convention was now being discussed in Parliament with a view to ratification. Yemen had taken action on a domestic level by passing legislation, establishing relevant organizations and working to draft a national strategy; 5 per cent of employment positions were now reserved for disabled persons.

20. The Islamic faith strongly encouraged care for older persons, who accounted for 3.45 per cent of Yemen's population. The first Government report on older persons had been issued in June 2007. The Government had hosted the first Arab regional conference on older persons in November 2007 and was now seeking to ensure comprehensive social care. However, the food and financial crises were hindering progress in developing countries such as Yemen. Intense efforts would be needed to confront these new challenges.

21. **Mr. Al-Allaf** (Jordan) said that his country saw education as a fundamental human right and the cornerstone of all human development policies. Some 12 per cent of the Government budget was allocated to education. Jordan was working to bridge the gender divide in that field; 98 per cent of girls now completed primary and secondary schools. One important initiative was the National Education Strategy, which was elaborated in 2006 and was supported by the Canadian International Development Agency, the United States Agency for International Development

and the Supporting Jordan's Education Reform Project. Also of note was the National Strategic Plan for 2008-2010, which followed parameters recommended by the World Bank.

22. The country was also working to improve the skills and living standards of teachers, in particular by contributing to a teachers' housing fund and establishing prizes for excellence in that field. Another programme sought to improve school meals, and was being extended to schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

23. Jordan was, moreover, a model of how public-private partnerships could be used to benefit education and ensure that it met the needs of the labour market. Yet despite its significant achievements, the country faced difficulties such as lack of funds and the need to develop its infrastructure. Nevertheless, it expected to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) within the agreed time frame.

24. **Mr. Muburi-Muita** (Kenya) said that his Government had undertaken reforms to improve economic performance and improve the lives of its citizens, for example by increasing access to education for youth and children and improving health care, in particular preventive care. Numerous problems nevertheless remained, such as high unemployment and low agricultural productivity, both of which exacerbated poverty and hunger. Poor agricultural performance was attributable in part to high production costs and low levels of technology. As a result of such problems, a high proportion of the population lived below the poverty line. Failure to address the current international energy, food and financial crises would increase poverty levels, affect social programmes and put at risk the modest gains in social development made to date.

25. That situation made it even more important to promote full employment and decent work for all. In Kenya, youth unemployment in particular was high, and many young people migrated to urban areas in the hope of escaping poverty and low paying agricultural jobs, causing social problems in the cities. In order to address that problem several measures had been adopted, including the Settlement Transfer Fund Trustees initiative, aimed at formalizing land holdings and thus facilitating access to credit. Other initiatives

were aimed at increasing productivity in the agricultural, fishing and livestock sectors.

26. Kenya had hosted the Third Global Youth Employment Summit in 2006, which had been aimed at capacity-building and identifying sustainable approaches to youth employment. In that context, his Government intended to establish a resource centre where young people could access employment-related information and was working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on youth-oriented action plans in such areas as health, crime, community service and education.

27. Kenya had adopted the Persons with Disabilities Act and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Plans were under way to establish a fund for persons with disabilities and improve the benefits and services available to them, including extended retirement, employment privileges and tax exemptions for materials related to their disability. In that regard, he stressed the need to continue efforts to enable the disabled to enjoy normal lives. While progress had been made towards social development, continued progress would be slow without stronger partnerships with the international community, civil society and the private sector. A concerted effort must therefore be made to develop joint initiatives, transfer technology and engage with youth and persons with disabilities in order to achieve internationally agreed development goals.

28. **Mr. Tun** (Myanmar) said that international progress towards social goals had been uneven, with disparities between rich and poor increasing in recent years. The trend had been exacerbated by the current economic crisis and soaring commodity prices, which affected the most vulnerable groups particularly. The problems of unemployment and underemployment were most acute in the developing world, where most of the labour force was to be found, but where there were relatively few opportunities for full and productive employment. Employment generation was therefore crucial. Unilateral sanctions imposed on countries for political reasons had a detrimental effect on employment generation, depriving citizens of their right to work. Such sanctions forced investors to shut down factories, hampering development and causing thousands of people to lose their jobs.

29. Myanmar was on track to carry out the Millennium Development Goals, with a national plan

focusing on balanced development of rural and urban areas. Significant progress had been achieved in the areas of poverty eradication, primary education, health care and environmental sustainability. Development projects, which provided job opportunities, were being implemented around the country. New cases of HIV/AIDS infections and other serious diseases were down, and gains had been made in maternity and child health care.

30. **Mr. Koh Sang-wook** (Republic of Korea) said that, despite world economic growth, problems such as income disparity, unemployment, population ageing and inadequate social protection remained. Continued efforts must therefore be made to implement the outcomes of the World Summit for Social Development, and he welcomed the analysis and recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/133). Particular attention must be paid to meeting the needs of socially vulnerable groups including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and migrants.

31. He also welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/63/95), in particular the proposed strategic implementation framework for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. By 2050 one out of every 10 persons in the world would be 60 or over and population ageing would lead to social and economic problems. More than 400 million older persons lived below the poverty line in the developing countries. Poverty reduction strategies must focus on the poorest and most vulnerable older persons, especially women, in order to meet the goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

32. Population ageing raised such issues as income security, social insurance, pension, life-long education and social welfare systems to meet the needs of the elderly. While in many less developed countries older persons had been cared for within the family, Governments were currently faced with the task of tackling the needs of their ageing populations, with international help. The Republic of Korea was the most rapidly aging society in the world, with the ratio of persons 65 or over expected to rise from 7.2 per cent in 2000 to more than 30 per cent by 2040. Accordingly, in 2006 his Government had developed a five-year policy to address the challenge of ageing, reform the retirement system and strengthen the old age safety net.

It would continue to review its policy and implement the Madrid Plan of Action and share lessons learned with international partners.

33. Despite the remarkable social progress made in social development, challenges remained, including equitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth and the elimination of social discrimination, especially against vulnerable groups. While every country must develop policies based on its specific situation, he urged all nations to join his Government in working to promote the shared goal of making the world more prosperous and equitable.

34. **Ms. Meda Garrido** (Nicaragua) said that, in a globalized economy that benefited the few and kept the many in poverty, the current crisis of the so-called free market system seemed to indicate that capitalism and social development were incompatible. The World Summit for Social Development had underscored the need for people-centred development and the elimination of inequality, yet little concrete progress had been made while the challenges seemed to become greater and greater, aggravated by the current financial instability and a food crisis caused by the increase in energy prices.

35. Given the unsustainable levels of unemployment and the lack of social development in the developing countries, the time had come to create a new financial and trade system in which Governments acted aggressively to balance economic growth and social development and formulated both national and international economic and social policies. The promotion of full employment and decent work for all should be at the centre of any such system, which must likewise include fair trade, the elimination of agricultural subsidies, the development of rural areas and agriculture in the developing countries and transfer of technology and specialized knowledge.

36. Her Government had made health care and education accessible to all and was working to increase the quality of education by reforming curricula to make Nicaraguan students more competitive, promote leadership and increase awareness about sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, self-awareness, interpersonal relations and gender equality. Low-interest loans had been provided to help farmers grow crops and sell them at reasonable prices. Support had been provided to small and medium enterprises, which accounted for 90 per cent of businesses, and

60 per cent of jobs, in particular for women and young people. Public financing was available and technical support centres offered advisory services. In Nicaragua the goal was not simply to promote job creation but to enhance the quality of jobs. For example, the minimum wage had been increased by 51 per cent.

37. Measures had been adopted to benefit women and families, by facilitating access to justice, credit, property, housing, training, which in turn increased the role that they played in society. An adult education programme and a literacy promotion campaign had been launched. Secondary school students visited isolated settlements to promote literacy. In addition, for the first time in the Caribbean region, social development programmes placed special emphasis on helping the indigenous population, which was disproportionately affected by poverty. Her Government was also trying to meet the needs of disabled persons by, for example, increasing their pensions and strengthening social programmes targeting them, and had ratified the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons.

38. The Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), based on the principles of solidarity, social justice, sovereignty, complementarity and fair trade, had played an important role in her Government's social renewal policies. She reiterated the importance of placing the economy at the service of mankind. Such an approach was diametrically opposed to current efforts to revive the moribund international financial system based on socializing losses by making the population as a whole pay for failures, while profits were privatized and shared by only a small minority at the expense of the majority.

39. **Mr. Sen** (India) said that achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all had been the theme of the multi-year programme of work of the World Summit for Social Development as well as the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that social policies had to be mainstreamed into macroeconomic policies. The current financial crisis made such mainstreaming a categorical imperative. Just a few days previously, European leaders had criticized speculative capitalism and said that entrepreneurs were needed, not speculators.

40. Similarly, 100 years earlier, the European Trade Union Confederation had stated in Seville in 1907 that

casino capitalism should be fought with taxation, regulation and worker involvement. Unfortunately, the policies of stock traders and investment bankers had prevailed, namely tax breaks for the rich, deregulation and no worker involvement. With the demise of Wall Street, it seemed that change was finally taking place. Unfortunately, the lack of equity and debt capital, the collapse of stock markets, and the sharp decline in exports and commodity prices would all have a catastrophic impact on employment across the globe, especially in the developing countries.

41. Given the extent of the crisis, the international financing and trading institutions would have to be restructured, together with international economic governance. The Bretton Woods institutions would have to return to their original mandate of promoting and maintaining high levels of employment. The United Nations could assist with a comprehensive audit of those institutions. It was essential to revive the Doha development round and tackle the real issues: duty-free and quota-free market access for the exports of the least developed countries, cotton subsidies, special products and the special safeguard mechanism in order to protect the vital interests of workers rather than purely commercial interests. Member States had to ensure that decisions were taken while there was still time.

42. In relation to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it was now all the more vital to increase employment and establish a new economic environment and governance. The least developed countries should use tariffs and domestic subsidies to develop their industries and promote economic development. One positive result of the financial crisis was the renewed recognition of the role of the State. The State and civil society should work together to do what was needed. In India, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, implemented by locally elected councils, provided 100 days assured employment to every household in the country. For the first time, the right to work was legally enforceable. The Act, in association with the Unorganized Sector Workers' Social Security Bill and others, was a means of empowering people to work towards the MDGs and move towards a more inclusive and productive society.

43. In conclusion, the right to education and the right to health were essential elements of the social basis of self-respect. A 1993 decision by the Indian Supreme Court had made the right to education legally

enforceable until the age of 14 years. Poverty levels had already been reduced and the goal was to reduce the percentage of the population living below the poverty line to 18.5 per cent by 2015. Over the period 1999-2005, employment rates had increased more rapidly than the rate of population growth.

44. **Ms. Kafanabo** (United Republic of Tanzania) stated that her delegation aligned itself with the statements made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Lesotho on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Development of the agricultural sector was of particular importance in her country in order to provide full employment and curb poverty because most of the population lived in rural areas. Measures to develop and modernize agriculture were being implemented by the Government, which welcomed a new plan by the World Food Programme to purchase the crops of poor, isolated farmers.

45. She expressed concern at delays in implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The development of a guide to national implementation of the Madrid Plan was a good step. The rights of older people should be respected. In that connection, her delegation supported the recommendation of the Secretary-General that a report on the rights of older persons be submitted at the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly. Likewise, the recommendations of the Secretary-General to develop guidelines for the advancement of persons with disabilities in development was a good step. The United Republic of Tanzania had begun the process of ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

46. Recognizing the centrality of literacy to development, her country had embraced the goal of education for all. Primary education was free and universal, with enrolment above 90 per cent. Near gender parity had been achieved. Nonetheless, illiteracy remained high. An adult education strategy had been put in place to provide basic learning to disadvantaged groups, in particular, women.

47. **Mr. Peralta (Paraguay)**, *Vice-Chairman*, took the Chair.

48. **Mr. Al-Nasser** (Qatar) said that, despite the existence of the political will, funding for adult literacy programmes remained insufficient. The report in document A/63/172 therefore rightly insisted that

donor States should prioritize literacy programmes and form partnerships with that end in mind. Qatar had been aware of the importance of the issue from an early stage: illiteracy had begun to recede there from the mid-1990s. The country's Education for a New Phase initiative had been praised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as one of the most successful models of its kind. It entailed the establishment of government schools based on the key principles of independence, accountability, diversity and freedom of choice for students.

49. At the regional and international levels, Qatar had sponsored a number of conferences in cooperation with UNESCO. The spouse of the head of State had acted as that organization's Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education. Such conferences had led notably to the Doha Declaration on Education for All of February 2008. The Declaration stressed expanding the pool of donors to include the private sector, non-governmental organizations and other concerned agencies, and underlined the plight of regions affected by conflict and foreign occupation. Qatar also supported literacy programmes in countries such as Lebanon, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq and Mauritania.

50. **Mr. Majoor (Netherlands)** resumed the Chair.

51. **Ms. Tadesse** (Ethiopia) said that many efforts were still needed at the global level to achieve the universal goal of eradicating poverty. Despite encouraging progress in some developing countries, the gap between rich and poor continued to widen. Youth unemployment was increasing at an alarming rate, older people still had insufficient social protection and the disabled were increasingly marginalized. Fair trade, a stable financial market, prudent fiscal policies and just labour markets throughout the world were a prerequisite for ending extreme poverty and establishing the infrastructure needed to promote decent work and social protection for all. International cooperation was a key element, and greater economic and social policy coherence were fundamental for creating sustainable employment opportunities.

52. States would need to take a holistic approach to address the issues of unemployment, underemployment and the absence of social protection and to work out a new social contract to bring hope to all members of society. Societal integration and maintaining social peace and security would also contribute to that

agenda. Respect for human rights, democratic principles and transparency, and accountability in international economic and political decision-making were essential components for balanced social development across the globe.

53. The Ethiopian Government had taken measures to accelerate the development of agriculture and small enterprises in order to increase employment. Agriculture was the mainstay of the country's economy, and an agriculture-led industrialization strategy implemented since 1994 had increased overall output as well as employment. The Integrated Housing Development Programme was promoting small and microenterprises to tackle unemployment. In the 2006/2007 budget year, over 2,000 small and microenterprises had participated in housing development programmes. Such development, together with the boom in the construction industry, had created jobs for urban dwellers in both the capital and the regions. A number of technical and vocational training centres had been established, with emphasis on the linkages and synergies between their programmes and the development of small enterprises.

54. Ethiopia had taken a number of measures to implement the outcome of the Second World Assembly on Ageing. A 10-year National Action Plan for Old Persons was based on the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and was being translated into various local languages. A Federal Coordination Forum had been established to popularize the Action Plan, and Government agencies involved in its implementation were preparing their own operational plans. Ethiopia had also signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and had started the ratification process. In conclusion, she called on development partners to support developing countries in their efforts to create jobs for young people and to provide adequate social protection for the aged and the disabled.

55. **Ms. Asmady** (Indonesia) said that in the present global emergency, with an economic recession in addition to the food and energy crises and the challenge of climate change, Member States would have to make even greater efforts to achieve the MDGs by the 2015 deadline. The Goals were based on people-centred growth that provided employment and access to health, education and nutritional food and opportunities to contribute to growth, with an emphasis on both the quality and quantity of employment. A

combination of international and national policies was required to favour pro-poor growth and employment and to support the expansion of large, medium-sized and small enterprises. Support for medium-sized enterprises would help to revitalize rural development and agriculture. The precarious situation of poor and unemployed young people should also be an urgent global priority.

56. Specific programmes were needed to address the emerging challenges of mainstreaming disability, the ageing population and social protection into development and employment policies and to overcome gender discrimination in employment. Climate change was another serious challenge and early adaptation measures should be promoted globally in the context of a low-carbon economy. The Committee should add the issue of the social and employment dimensions of climate change to its agenda.

57. The international community should intensify its efforts to implement the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade. Despite the progress made, particularly in developing countries, wide regional disparities persisted. More effective delivery on the ground and new resources through stronger partnerships were needed. Youth literacy programmes would also contribute to reducing youth unemployment and underemployment rates.

58. Indonesia's 12-year basic education development plan exceeded international targets for universal primary education. Access to primary education was already almost universal, and the literacy rate for persons over 15 years had reached 92.8 per cent in 2007. Education policy actions were focused on expanding and improving access to learning opportunities, improving teacher performance, increasing the education budget to 20 per cent of the State budget and promoting gender-based interventions. Full, productive and decent work should continue to be at the centre of macroeconomic policies to ensure that economic growth was inclusive. Small and medium-sized enterprises deserved greater support in view of their resilience to global shocks and their proven record of contributing to employment and the agricultural sector and rural development.

59. **Ms. Kavun** (Ukraine) said that her country aligned itself fully with the statement made by the Presidency of the European Union and reiterated its

commitment to the complete and effective implementation of the goals set out in the global social development agenda. Decent living standards were the primary goal of reform in Ukraine. A new set of social initiatives had been announced by its President in 2007. They included raising the minimum wage; increasing military allowances; increasing the salaries of public sector employees and of teachers, doctors and other professionals in rural regions; and providing benefits to families with five or more children, including allowances, priority access to public housing and free tuition at public universities for children from such families. Furthermore, rural medical clinics would all be equipped with at least one ambulance before the end of 2008.

60. Other reforms were planned to combat poverty, assist the elderly and persons with disabilities and provide additional social protections called for in the current market economy. Policies and strategies to achieve full employment and decent work for all should include specific measures to promote gender equality and social integration of marginalized groups. Consideration of the issue of social integration as a priority theme by the Commission for Social Development would contribute significantly to reducing inequalities, promoting access to basic social services and increasing the participation of social groups.

61. **Mr. Paudel** (Nepal) said that his country aligned itself with the statement made by Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Nepal was undergoing major sociopolitical transformations, and its legislature, one of the most inclusive in the world in terms of ethnicity, gender and geographic region, was in the process of drafting a new constitution. The 2007-2010 interim plan contained provisions to improve the quality of life of the poor and promote economic development and social inclusion, including for indigenous peoples. New policies provided social security for the elderly and for widows.

62. A Ministry of Youth had been established. Young people would be involved in policy development, the restructuring of the State and the socio-economic transformation. The Government also sought to end illiteracy and make education inclusive and equitable at all levels, including making primary education universal. Nepal had formulated a national policy and action plan for people with disabilities. A national committee for disabled persons had been established,

and the law on civil service had been amended to give persons with disabilities opportunities for employment with the Government. Lastly, the international community should do more to provide assistance to the least developed countries, least developed countries emerging from conflict, and landlocked developing countries, which were bearing the brunt of the food, fuel and energy crises.

63. **Mr. Monterey Suay** (El Salvador) said his country was implementing over 30 programmes to improve conditions and opportunities for the country's youth, which accounted for around 19 per cent of the population. El Salvador agreed with the findings of international agencies and think tanks, contained in documents such as the World Bank's World Development Report 2007, which found that investment in younger persons would continue to be the key to development. Such policies were a fundamental prerequisite for social development. El Salvador was preparing to host the XVIII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government, which would discuss youth and development.

64. Education and the spread of literacy were one of the most important ways to break the circle of poverty. The Government was committed to projects including financial support for families in order to keep children in school. Gender equality was also being supported, notably by including gender issues in national curricula and promoting education for girls.

65. El Salvador was working to honour its commitment to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol. A commission had been formed gathering legal representatives from the concerned agencies, with a view to making national legislation compatible with the Convention. The Ministry of Education was enacting policies to foster diversity and mainstreaming in education, and the Government continued to work to achieve the MDGs.

66. **Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his country remained committed to the outcomes of the World Summits for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 and 2000. The Government sought to establish a social market economy which would balance a productive and sustainable economy with equitable income redistribution. In view of the rapid changes in information and communications technology, the creation of employment opportunities

was a pressing issue. Education for All would be vital to promote social and economic development. National plans were being enacted by capable, creative and socially responsible individuals. Volunteers had also been instrumental in implementing projects that had raised employment.

67. The Syrian Arab Republic had been at the forefront of efforts to protect disabled persons. The tenth Five-Year Plan had singled out a number of approaches, such as direct financial assistance, aid projects and attention to disadvantaged groups. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs had earmarked funds to benefit disabled persons. Legislation had been passed determining that 4 per cent of public-sector posts would be reserved for disabled persons; providing incentives for companies that hired such persons; exempting organizations active in that domain from customs duties; and granting a 50 per cent discount on land, sea and air travel, depending on the nature of the disability. The Syrian Arab Republic had signed the Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons and formed a National Committee to work towards ratifying the Convention and its Optional Protocol.

68. The right to development and decent work ought not to be ignored in the case of peoples affected by foreign occupation, instability and aggression. He hoped that the Third Committee would address the issue of disabilities caused by the use of weapons, such as cluster bombs and landmines, and that the proposed strategic implementation framework for the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing would consider the needs of older persons living under foreign occupation.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.